

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

THE LIFE TO COME.

BEYOND THE GATES. By ELIZABETH STUART Phelps. 16mo, pp. 196. Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

The extraordinary vividness with which, even in a materialistic period, the public turns toward books of this class is a strong proof of the persistence of that innate conviction of a future life which philosophers have so often cited as an argument for the immortality of the soul. Speculations upon the nature of heaven are always popular. The immense personal importance of the question of immortality, the most practical of all questions which can be presented to the human mind, is instinctively and often unconsciously admitted by the sceptical themselves; and works which deal with the great mystery of the future are read with an interest quite independent of their literary merit. We do not mean to say that the new book by Miss Phelps attracts us only by its subject; far from it: imagination carries her as the title indicates—on a bolder flight than when some years ago she only looked through "The Gates Ajar," and she tries to answer more fully than before the unformulated questions of curious believers; but, apart from all this, the story—as we suppose we may call it—is a beautiful piece of art, rising at times almost to the domain of poetry.

It would be useless to discuss the reasonableness of Miss Phelps's conception of heaven, because everybody's opinions in that matter must be governed by temperament, education and religious belief; but there will be no dispute about the verisimilitude of her narrative as a literary exercise. If the occupations of the dead are not likely to be what she describes, at least we find it easy to conceive of a realm of existence somewhere in which they might be such; and her account of the transition from this world to the next will seem to most of her readers entirely simple and natural. The story is told in the first person. The narrator has been ill for two weeks, and is lying at the point of death. There is an admirable description of her falling away into a stupor:

"I do not remember saying anything more after this. I certainly did not suffer any more. I felt quiet and assured. Now I am very tired."

The room became dim, and I thought they must have fallen asleep, and left me with the nurse, and that she finding me had well had her fallen asleep. This rested me—to feel that I was no longer causing them pain—more than anything could have done; and I began to think how still I could dimly make myself.

This conviction quieted my mind. I turned over with my face toward the wall, to go to sleep.

I grew calmer, and yet more calm, as I lay there. There was a cross of Swiss carvings on the wall, hanging over a picture of my father, Leonardo's Christ—the one he made for the Duke of Savoy.

I was all alone, and my father's voice of sleep advanced. The room was darkened, as it had been since I became so ill, that I was not sure whether it were night or day. The clock was striking.

I think the odor of the incense which I smelled before sleep, and I remembered, as I did so, the theories which gave to the sense of smell greater significance than of the rest; and remembered to have read that it was either the last or the first to give way in the dreamer.

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